



# Gilmer County Schools

Dr. Brian Ridley, Superintendent

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## GCS COVID Update August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Dear Parents & Staff,

Last week I presented you with our plans to implement specific Covid prevention strategies based on the district's weekly status on established metrics. Unfortunately, the numbers of students quarantined and diagnosed with Covid has skyrocketed over the weekend surpassing all expectations. In fact, as I write this letter 648 of our students (15.5%) are in quarantine, there are over 30 positive cases of Covid among the school population and it is only Tuesday.

As your superintendent, I feel that it is imperative that we act now in an effort to keep our students safe and our schools open. Even though our quarantine data has surpassed the point at which we had planned to implement multiple mitigation efforts, I believe that it is important for our district to move forward in an incremental manner that will allow us to isolate which strategies actually make a difference in order to develop a plan that works for our community.

Therefore, effective Monday August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, I will implement the first level of additional quarantine mitigation by requiring masks/face coverings for all staff and students on school buses until further notice. Although this requirement was part of last year's Covid response, we recognize that masking is a sensitive issue. We are communicating this change to parents and guardians well in advance so that those who do not wish for their student to wear a mask can arrange alternate transportation to and from school.

Additionally, we are updating our quarantine and contact tracing guidance for students:

**Exposure Outside School** - We will calculate a return date with 7, 10 and 14 day quarantine options and send this information home to parents. We ask that parents follow up with DPH and notify us of any changes.

**School Exposure** - We will report contacts to DPH and send home the letter provided with return dates calculated. If DPH provides different information, parents should let us know.

**Exposure of Vaccinated Persons** - Vaccinated students will **NOT** be quarantined following the 10th day after full vaccination.

**Exposure of Recent Covid Positive** - An exposed person with a documented Covid Positive within the last 90 days will NOT be quarantined.

**Exposure of Masked Persons** - Students who are masked during their exposure will NOT be quarantined.

**Covid Positives** – As always, positive staff and students will quarantine 10 days AND be fever free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications with an improvement of symptoms.

**Masking** - All students and staff are HIGHLY ENCOURAGED to wear a mask/face covering during close contacts with others. Regardless of how you may feel about the efficacy of masks, the fact is that, in many cases, they DO prevent students from being quarantined when exposed to infection.

The GCS is committed to continually monitoring the data and adjusting our response accordingly. We sincerely appreciate your cooperation in our efforts to keep our schools open and our students safe.

If you have additional questions, you can contact our local Department of Public Health or the nurse at your child's school.

Thank you

**Dr. Brian Ridley**  
*Superintendent,*  
**Gilmer County Schools**

Every Child, Every Opportunity, Every Day!